The Black Cat

November 1903

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Will B. Wilder.

The Lynching at Crutcher's.
David Lowry.

The Door Without a Keyhole.
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The Green Gamp.*

BY F. E. CHASE.

IN fifty-eight years the establishment of J. Hicks, licensed Pawnbroker, had suffered many changes, generally for the worse. Its neighborhood had degenerated from smart respectability to unabashed seediness. The once dignified reserve of its curtained windows — Hicks had been a banker by proclamation in the beginning — had given place to the cheap allurements of unredeemed pledges, frankly offered for sale. Within, dirt and decay had made their home in every corner of its neglected premises. One thing alone had changed for the better. Hicks himself had been modulated by the great composer, Time, from a particularly vulgar, self-assertive young man of twenty into a veteran of a singular gentleness and benignity of aspect, largely due, it must be owned, to a patriarchal beard, the most successful advertising medium the business had ever known. Seen through its highly refracting medium, as through a magnifying glass, the smallest advances seemed munificent, and the most usurious rates of interest loomed up as benefactions through its deceptive mist.

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* The writer of this story received a cash prize of $200 in THE BLACK CAT story contest ending February 26, 1902.

In fifty-eight years many things had come into the little shop and gone again. Love and joy and death and bitterness, and pledges innumerable, waning with the years from the dignity of watches and wedding rings to the degradation of flat-irons and the bed blankets. A wife had been given into his care for a season, at some crisis of Providential unthrift, but had been redeemed again in due time, and taken out of his stricken hands. A son had come to him in the way of life's business. A bad loan, this, and one that had cost him dear. Yet, now that he too was gone, the father would have made an even more liberal advance to have him back. And it had somehow gradually come about, through some resultant twist in the old man's mind, that, in a general way, he preferred his pledges to his money, that he relinquished them often with manifest regret, and that certain immemorial items of collateral upon his shelves, representing money hopelessly lost to him, had become nevertheless the source of profound satisfaction.

Such was No. 831 as it stood entered upon his books.

Commercially regarded, No. 831 was a green silk umbrella with a heavy metal handle of considerable intrinsic value; sentimentally, it stood for Hicks' oldest and dearest friend; psychologically, it supplied him, other motives being lacking, with something to live for.

Its history was a simple one, but of quite exceptional interest.

It had been pawned one morning in the early years of his business life by a respectable elderly gentleman, who, after some haggling, accepted for it the sum of four dollars. With this sum and the customary ticket, he went out of Hicks' establishment, and was never again seen there or elsewhere.

Nearly a year from the date of this transaction, and just before the expiration of the term of the loan, a young man had turned up, and had inquired with evident anxiety regarding the pledged umbrella. His description was accurate, and Hicks had no difficulty in identifying the article, and no reason for denying its possession.

"It is most important," said the young man, "for — for family reasons, that this article be redeemed. There is no objection, I presume, to my paying the loan and interest, on behalf of my — my relative, and taking the property out of your hands."

"None whatever," said Hicks, "provided you have the ticket."

"Surely that is unimportant," urged the stranger, "so that you get your money. Suppose we say double the amount, by way of penalty for my carelessness in having lost the ticket."

"That won't do," said the broker. "Supposing it turned up?"

"But it can't turn up," said the young man earnestly. "It is at the bottom of the sea with the man to whom you gave it."

"How can you prove that to me?" said Hicks. "No, no, my friend, I must have my ticket."

"But the thing is worthless — I will pay you ten times the loan to safeguard you against any claim — twenty times! Good God!" he cried excitedly. "I must have it, man; more depends upon it than you know."

But Hicks was obdurate, and the stranger, after having exhausted his stock of argument, entreaty and pecuniary temptation, finally went away.

When he had gone, the broker took down the umbrella from its shelf and examined it with a new interest. It was an excellent umbrella, solidly respectable as to handle and stoutly serviceable as to fabric, yet scarcely deserving the valuation the young man had put upon it. Doubtless its value was sentimental merely; and yet — the claimant had been strangely eager. There was some mystery about it. Well, in thirty days it might be solved, for if, as the young man had said, its owner and the ticket were both at the bottom of the sea, the umbrella would become his when the loan matured.

But the matter turned out by no means so simply. Two days before the loan matured, the young man returned, clearly fortified with a better knowledge of the business and of his powers and privileges, paid the interest on the loan for another year, and thus renewed the matter for that period. Hicks accepted the money with an odd sense of defeat and discomfiture, and when his visitor had gone away with his receipt, he again took down the umbrella, spread it, and seating himself beneath its superfluous shade, pondered deeply upon its mystery, but to no sort of satisfactory result.

"At least," he said to himself as he closed and replaced it, "possession is nine points, even if he *has* scored one."

In twelve months more, just as Hicks' imagination was beginning to hover in close circles about his mysterious pledge, the young man again returned and renewed the loan as before, after again trying vainly to negotiate its surrender. In another twelvemonth the same performance took place, and again at the fourth and fifth anniversaries of the transaction. Each year Hicks' visitor looked thinner and more careworn, and his argument grew more languid and perfunctory; but if his pursuit was less eager it was not less persistent, and each annual recurrence of the date found him promptly on hand to protect his mysterious interests.

Between whiles the pawnbroker never saw him or heard from him, but there was scarcely a day that he did not think of him and of his pursuit, and scarcely a week that, in an ecstacy of baffled curiosity and greed — for to his inflamed imagination the simple gamp had become the key to treasures untold — he did not take down the article and re-examine it, rap it, sound it, rattle it, feel its fabric inch by inch, and, upon occasion, curse its silent secretiveness in good set terms.

Its metal head was large and heavy, solid, apparently, to all tests that he dared make, and cast or carved at the top into the semblance of a grotesque head with staring, deep-set eyes. Cut or otherwise invade the substance of stick or handle he dared not, as a matter of professional scruple; and finally, noting that his frequent handling was causing signs of wear, he was forced, for the same reason, to deny himself altogether the futile pleasure of touching it, save upon rare and eagerly anticipated occasions. But he hung it on the wall above his desk, and there it stood before him day by day, a beacon and a goal, a beckoning hand, a bow of promise. Twice he was sick to death, but they brought the umbrella to his bedside, and he straightway got well. He came back forlornly from his wife's newly made grave and sat down before his talisman, and was presently consoled. His son robbed and shamed him, but he knew a way to be heartened and uplifted. The infinite possibilities of the umbrella spread themselves above him and shielded him from the storm of circumstances.

Thus time went on, the young man still coming doggedly year after year, every season older and grayer, soon a middle-aged man,

by and by an old man, older than his years, shabbier than once and feebler, but still unfailing in patience. He was always safely in time with his payment, but occasionally a little later than usual, because, perhaps, he had to journey far, or because money was scarce, and he had trouble to get even the poor sum needed to protect the pledge. Meanwhile the broker lived in a state of eager anticipation, the more controlling that it was utterly undefined. Each year was to him a crescendo of hope, ending in sharp disappointment. His life and its affairs went on merely as the left hand part or accompaniment to the air provided by the disputed umbrella.

Thus more than half a century went by, and as the fifty-eighth anniversary of what had now come to be the chief event of his life approached, Hicks felt a livelier hope than usual stir within him. His annual visitor had seemed unusually feeble at the time of his last visit, and the chance that he could have survived appeared comfortingly remote. A conviction that at length the mystery of so many years would be somehow revealed to him penetrated the old pawnbroker's mind, and as the critical date approached, he felt an almost youthful eagerness of anticipation. As a rule his visitor had turned up a day or two earlier than was necessary, but this year he had not appeared on the morning of the final day.

By the terms of the loan the owner's rights expired at noon, and as that hour approached, Hicks took down the umbrella with an unsteady hand and deliberated upon a plan of investigation. He had amply provided himself with tools, and only awaited liberty to use them.

One ! Two ! Three ! Four ! Five ! Six ! Seven ! Eight ! Nine ! Ten ! Eleven ! Twelve !

Hicks had selected a cold chisel from his lay-out, and was poising a hammer to strike, when a shadow fell upon his desk, and a familiar voice said:

"Yes, you've beaten. I haven't the price. I've tried hard, but when one hasn't money to pay for food, even bigger things must go."

Hicks paused in his work and looked at his visitor. He was pale and emaciated, and could hardly stand from weakness. What

little life was left him burned in his eyes, with which he eagerly devoured the article the two had so long contended for.

"Let me show you," he said. "There is an easier way."

He took the umbrella from Hicks and, inserting an awl in one eye of the carved face on the umbrella head, with this leverage easily unscrewed the top, to the pawnbroker's amazement and disgust. The cavity thus discovered contained only a piece of folded paper, yellow with age. Upon this Hicks pounced with a kind of whine of animal greed and satisfaction.

But the stranger's hand fell upon his with an energy of which his feeble body scarcely seemed capable.

"Don't touch it!" he cried. "For God's sake don't. It is nothing — nothing to you; to me it is so much. No," he urged, as Hicks strove to withdraw his prize. "Not yet, at any rate. Not until you have heard my story."

He sank into a chair, his hand still grasping Hicks' wrist, and went on passionately:

"It belonged to her father — this umbrella. He was my employer, and a rich man; and I loved his daughter, and she loved me. But he found it out, and forbade me his house — forbade me to think of her. But I wouldn't give her up, and she wouldn't give me up, and so we used to write one another every day, and send the letters back and forth in this umbrella handle. The old man always carried it, wet or dry, and I used to watch my chance during the day and unscrew the top while he was out of the office, and put in my letter, and she did the same at home. It seemed a great joke then to make him our postman. Good God! What a joke it turned out."

Hicks slowly withdrew his hand, leaving the yellow paper between them on the desk.

"Business went wrong," continued the stranger after a pause. "The old man got involved worse and worse, tried the wrong way out of it, and had to skip. He realized on everything he had — even this, as it turned out — and left between two days, taking her with him. They sailed for South America on the *Ginevra* — you remember — she was never heard from — never even spoken. And never a word from her — it was all so sudden — I knew that — but something might have been done — I couldn't understand.

I guess I went pretty near out of my mind. My body just went round without me, somehow, for months, doing the old things without my knowing anything about it, when all at once I thought of the old 'umbrella route,' as we used to call it. It was a chance. Perhaps she didn't have any other. All their things had been scattered by sale, but I hunted and hunted. There were a hundred chances that he had taken it with him, but I took the one that he hadn't. By and by I thought of the pawn shops, and went the rounds. I guess yours was about the last, and when I got my eyes on the old thing, it was like coming home. But the ticket stuck me, and I couldn't tell my story to such a man as you were then. You've changed a good deal in fifty-eight years."

He paused, and looked longingly at the letter.

"That's what I wanted. I knew it was there. Her last letter to me. The last one she ever wrote. It made me wild at first to think that if I could only get my hands on the thing for a minute, I could have it out. But you never let me touch it. What'd you think it was — money ?"

Hicks nodded.

"Money !" cried the other. "I've wanted money pretty bad, but never the way I wanted that letter. But I couldn't seem to tell at first, and by and by, when I got to *know* it was there, waitin' for me, it didn't seem to matter much, so that I could keep it safe. And I have !" he cried. "And here it is."

"Fifty-eight years," exclaimed Hicks. "You damned old fool ! Why didn't you tell me this fifty-eight years ago ?"

And pushing the letter toward his companion, he turned away.

With a little weak moan of satisfaction the stranger seized the paper and carefully opened it.

It may have been five minutes before the old pawnbroker ventured to turn and look at him.

He sat just as he had left him, huddled together in his chair, the letter in his hand, his chin on his breast — dead.

Saint Devil.*

BY SARAH COMSTOCK.

HEN the yacht *La Paloma* fluttered into sight, Padre Diego crossed himself.

"Why do you do so?" asked old Padre Juan.

"I do not know," replied the young priest, but he made the sign twice more.

The two Franciscans were standing together in the Mission's outer corridor. They used to go there every evening to watch the sun when, hanging in Santa Barbara's sky, it was gulped all at once by the sudden southern night.

Just as it flashed for the last time the slender yacht slipped into harbor.

"She glides in gently, like a white dove of peace," said Padre Juan.

"She creeps in stilly and surely, like an evil thought into the heart," said Padre Diego.

His eyes were strained toward the vessel. The muscles of his strong face and lithe body were tense. With his straight, black brows drawn to meeting, he gazed sombrely upon the yacht.

"I cannot tell how," he said, "but I know that there is evil hidden under those pure white sails."

"Then the Lord will guard us," said the elder priest. He formed a cross with thumb and forefinger as he uttered the words of the Santiguase. Then, "En el nombre del Padre."

"Y del Hijo," continued the other.

"Y del Espirito Santo."

"Amen," chanted the old and the young voices together, and together the lumbering old knees and the supple young ones bent in prayer.

When the two arose night had set in.

"Look!" cried Padre Diego, pointing to where the yacht had

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dropped anchor. A shadow had fallen upon the sails and blackened them and she lay still upon the water.

"See, she hovers, black and ominous as a raven," said he, turning away with a shudder.

. . . . . .

Idling, gossiping, summering Santa Barbara was given something new to twitter about next day.

A yacht named *La Paloma* had arrived from unknown parts, bearing unknown people. The inmates of the Hotel Darlington assembled on its veranda and discussed.

"It's a wedding trip, I know," asserted the girl who looked like a bit of Dresden china. "I met her on the street to-day, and it was plain at a glance that everything she wore was brand new from hat to heels."

"What sort of a looking man is he?" asked the girl with the Yankee-keen eyes.

"No man has been seen; she has been walking alone all day."

"Then that finishes the wedding-trip hypothesis," said the businesslike Yankee girl, making a mental note of the fact.

"Nonsense — that strengthens it," snapped a hanger-on named Wilshire. It was an ill-judged remark, for everybody surmised that he had been refused by Alice Neal.

"No; for it's as soon as men begin to know us that we have to hold them so tightly," put in Miss Neal with a generosity which confirmed the report of the refusal.

"Married or not, the woman's a saint," said Dr. Poultney. "Never saw such a face outside a picture. Looks like Cecilia. When I met her on the beach I had a notion that if I rubbed my glasses I could see the halo."

"That's true, Dr. Poultney," said Alice Neal. "If she ever comes near the hotel we girls might as well flee before we are routed. There she is now. Come on, girls."

A chorus of protests from the men stopped her. She turned back and, with the others, watched the white figure coming up the dusty street.

It was in one of the comments made as the stranger passed the hotel then that someone spoke of her as the Saint Woman and the name clung until she left Santa Barbara. It was Poultney, I be-

lieve, who called her that. And it was he who afterwards named her Saint Devil, and that name has clung, even to this day.

Any of that summer's crowd at the Hotel will tell you that they always remember her as she looked that afternoon when she passed, and they, assembled, watched her. She made a curious impression upon even the most unimaginative of them—an impression of unreality. The day was hot and the streets dusty and everyone else coming in from so much as a block's walk looked grimy and moist; but she was as spotless, as fresh and cool in her white gown as if she had not touched the earth at all, but had somehow sailed over its earthiness. Young and slight and pale she was, without a touch of color except in the yellow of her hair and in her eyes.

"The eyes were blue," insisted the arrogant professor, in one of the later discussions. He was near-sighted and he had never met her face to face but once. Still, he insisted. "They were blue and simple and pretty like any baby's."

"You are surely mistaken, Professor," urged a Greek-letter man from Stanford. The Saint Woman had once stopped him on the street to ask him the best way to the Mission. "Her eyes were black and cunning," he said.

"I know them to be treacherous and green, like a cat's," announced a man who had once shaken hands with the President at a stand-up reception and always afterwards spoke of him as "a good fellow." He never had been known to have anything to do with the Saint Woman, but he liked to hobnob with celebrities in his conversation.

"Her eyes always had that same catty look," he asserted.

"They were opals," said Poultney quietly. "They held all colors and once I saw them burn red and translucent like a ruby. That was when one of her servants made her angry by disobedience. He didn't disobey long."

What Poultney said settled it. He was the only one who had ever been aboard *La Paloma*, who had ever talked with the Saint Woman. This was when he had been summoned one day to attend a sick servant, and the information he brought back concerning the vessel and its people was about all that Santa Barbara ever possessed.

It seemed that the Saint Woman herself was the only passenger. Her servants and crew consisted of South Pacific natives; one of these was sailing master and his wife acted as stewardess. They spoke only their native tongue, in which their mistress addressed them. None left the yacht, except for supplies.

Piecing together a few allusions which the doctor heard and their own ever-ready fictions, those interested finally agreed that the woman was a widow or an orphan from some colonized island in the South Seas and that she was heir to large wealth which enabled her to travel in luxurious fashion. Altogether, this is a good enough theory, as it is easily borne out by the data, and if it be wrong nobody will ever know the difference.

"There's something queer about the whole concern," said Poultney. "The woman's lonely way of travelling is odd. And she is odd. Never saw such queer eyes in my life — the way they change and the way they look through you.

"Funny thing happened while I was out there. I wanted cold water to dissolve some pellets in and I told her so. She rang for a servant and when the man came I swear that all she did was to look at him — never said a word nor made a motion. Just one quick look, and off he walked and brought the water."

She was on shore herself every day, but she made no acquaintances. Her wanderings always wound up at the Mission, where she would spend hours in the relic room, carelessly turning over the pages of old monastic volumes, or in the chapel, where she would sit quietly watching the gleams of sunlight that flickered over the cold walls, or in the corridor, idly strolling up and down.

Old Padre Juan tells me that this had been going on for a week before Padre Diego met her. Nobody else can remember exactly, but Padre Juan must be right, for he it was who knew and loved best the young priest. Padre Juan has been very different since it all happened — his chin droops wearily against his cassock, and there is never an afternoon that he may not be found walking lonely in the petunia garden where is built a row of monks' cells, narrow and deep in the ground. He will be given one of these cells before long and he looks at them as if he would be glad to come.

It was there that Padre Diego came upon her. Another priest

had unlocked the door for her, as is usual in showing visitors the Mission, and then, being called away, he had summoned Padre Diego to take his place and lock the door after she had gone.

"A tourist," was what he had been told. Tourists were very much alike and they did not interest him and he was thinking of other things when he stepped out from the chapel into the burying ground, swinging the chain of keys with the surplus of nervous vigor that the monastery walls cramped and fretted. He restlessly jingled them against the wall as he walked. Even the brown cassock could not hide his wiry physique, which had not yet learned the stoop that comes under the hood. His cropped head was erect, well-poised, rugged. It looked like a fine work in marble that has not yet been chiselled to a nicety.

He was impatient in soul at having to show a tourist about. But when he stepped out from the chapel and came upon her he thought that a vision had been vouchsafed him.

Frail enough to be not of this world, beautiful enough to be of a better, she looked. The garden of graves itself was more human than she. Its sod was warm, its air was vivid, its petunias glowed in a mass of summer reds. But she was white, all white; white of face, of hand, of gown; she was so slight that she might disappear like a breeze; she was so rapt as she gazed upon a grave that there seemed no longer any real world in her consciousness.

He was afraid to move lest he disturb her.

She spoke at last without looking toward him. She had not once done so, yet she seemed to see.

"Tell me," she said, "how you, so young and vigorous and full of the power and love of life can cramp your power within these walls."

He was startled at her seeing him without looking, and he did not answer. She lifted her opal eyes and turned them full upon his.

As she did so there came over him the same dread as on the evening when he had first seen her yacht. He made the sign of the cross. Again and again he made it, but his eyes were not upon heaven. They were fastened to hers, which held them and would not let go. She reached out a cold hand and touched his, never relaxing her gaze.

"Tell me," she whispered, "do you never want to go away? You who know the world so well? You know how big and beautiful it is. I love to sail over it in my boat. Do you never want to go?"

He was conscious of a feeling like that of a nightmare — a dread of he knew not what, of a force he could not grapple with. He fluttered like a bird under a snake's gaze and at last, with a terrific effort, he wrenched away his eyes and fled to the chapel. There, before the dim altar, he fell upon his knees and prayed as he had never prayed against the world or the flesh.

"Deliver me from the Devil," he groaned.

The woman showed no surprise. She passed softly behind him through the chapel and walked down the hill to her boat.

Through the days that followed a cloud hung over Padre Diego. He ate and slept little, not, apparently, because he was sick, but because his mind was preoccupied.

"What ails him?" asked the Prefect several times.

"I do not know," Padre Juan would reply. But he slipped a bead at each time he said it in a misgiving whether he had lied. For though Padre Diego did not speak openly, he threw out a two and two from which his friend could construct four.

"Brother, does the Devil wear woman's form?" he asked once.

"No, no," in a reassuring tone, as to a troubled child. "No doubt woman is temptation enough of herself."

"But I am sure I have seen the Devil look out from a woman's eyes."

"Brood not upon such thoughts. You strengthen them by doing so. Use the great power of your mind to drive them away rather than to turn them against yourself."

This was the warning which Padre Diego should have heeded and did not.

The next time she came was on a Sunday. Morning mass was being said in the historic chapel, which the devout and the curious crowded. The soft glow of many candles shed light upon the rich adornment of images and painting and embroidery that had found their way to California with the first Spanish Fathers. Incense hung in the warm air, stiflingly sweet. The slow chanting of solemn voices sounded down the aisles and in response rose one, young and strong and beautiful.

"That is Padre Diego's voice," whispered a resident to a tourist.

"Ah, he is the one who started out in life as an opera singer?"

"Yes — sang and won fame in the opera of Madrid, then gave up the whole thing for a fanatical whim."

"Lucky you of Santa Barbara!"

Higher and clearer rang out the voice. It was chanting alone a long response and the face of the priest was toward the altar. Eyes as well as ears were bent upon him, as if they, too, drank in the sound.

Up, up rose the voice toward his high note, his famous note, for the sake of which music, as sung in cathedrals all over the world, had been rewritten. Up, up! Then there happened what had never happened before in all his services.

The voice wavered, trembled, like one staggering on a dizzy cliff-edge, and then it gave out.

The singer wheeled slowly and faced the congregation, but he was not looking at them. His eyes were fixed beyond them, and mechanically the people turned and followed his gaze.

The Saint Woman had entered unobserved. She stood white and silent against the wall, her eyes holding those of the priest.

When the people turned she dropped her gaze and walked quietly forward to a seat. The on-lookers gained the impression that she had just entered and had paused there only for the moment. Her manner was unconscious and might have warded off a climax. But when she let go Padre Diego's eyes he stood dumb for an instant. Then, as if rousing himself from a sleep, he gathered his forces and swept his eyes over the whole assembly.

"People of Santa Barbara," he cried in the voice of a prophet, "the Evil One is among us. Let us pray together for the salvation of all our souls."

Then he fell on his knees and the awe-stricken people did likewise, and he prayed in a way that never will be forgotten by those who heard.

The Saint Woman knelt and looked the most devout of all.

. . . . . .

That was the last time that she was seen by the citizens. She was not known to go to the Mission again and she ceased her lonely strolls through the town. The yacht still lay in harbor and a

servant appeared in the shops one day to lay in a great supply of goods. He did his buying by means of signs, and when the Stanford boy asked him about his mistress he only stared.

People could not agree as to what the priest's warning had meant. Some were sure that he referred directly to the Saint Woman; they had always thought there was something queer about her, anyway, and wasn't it plain that he had been looking directly at her before he uttered his strange words? Others said that he must have had a revelation from within and have seen what no one else did. As to the Evil One to whom he referred being the Saint Woman, that was absurd. Didn't everyone remember how she joined in the prayer?

As for the priest, his days were passed in fasting, his nights in prayer. He tossed so many nights through that at last he staggered and literally fell asleep during matins, and after that he wore a cruel rope against his flesh in penance.

Padre Juan, who read his heart, remonstrated with him.

"You are full of idle fancies," the old priest protested. "Sleep and eat more, and think upon holy rather than evil things. Do not try so consciously to resist evil — resist by ignoring. You are a strong man, with a strong will, and you are using that power of yours to arm evil against yourself. It will gain greater power over you than if you were weaker."

Again the same warning fell upon unheeding ears.

"May the Holy Virgin grant that I see the woman no more," Padre Diego implored. "Once more, and I could not resist."

"Resist what, Brother? Can it be human love that you are struggling with?"

The young priest burst forth excitedly, almost indignantly. "No," he cried, "it is not love. I never felt any impulse of love for her. It is hate, rather. But there is something compelling about the woman that I have all the time been contending with, and I cannot contend longer. My strength is giving out."

"But you have seen her only twice, is it not so?"

"No, no, this is not the first of it. It began long, long ago."

He sat for a little while in a despairing silence and the old man waited and let him take his time in the telling.

"It was back in the time when I was given over to worldly ambi-

tion — when I was singing in the opera of Madrid. My success, as the world terms it, was great; and my whole soul was in my art. Young as I was I had reached almost the top of my profession when I gave it up.

"I have never told you exactly how it all came about. It was in this way:

"I was, that last season, singing leading tenor rôles. My impresario was indulging me, older men were imitating me, Madrid was petting me. Then my voice gave out."

The old priest started. "What is this, my Brother?" he said. "Then did you join the church in the bitterness of worldly failure? I have always believed that in the height of success you voluntarily made the sacrifice." His shrunken old lips twitched with the pain of disappointment.

"No, it was voluntary. I did make the sacrifice, prompted by a strange circumstance. Hear me through.

"One night I was singing my famous solo in which the music had been altered to reach my high note, the same that you know. Just as I came to it I felt an irresistible impulse to look toward a box on the left side of the house. My eyes swerved toward it and there I met the gaze of the woman. I know now that she is the same. I knew it that first day in the cemetery as soon as she lifted those eyes and I saw them.

"My voice did not break then in the opera, but I finished the performance stupidly. The next night the same thing happened and for several nights. All the time I felt a strange trouble and dread whenever this woman crossed my thoughts or met my eyes. I had no idea who she was nor did I try to find out. She repelled me in spite of her beauty. But I had to admit to myself her power, although I was loath to do so.

"All the time my dread was growing stronger. I believed that the Evil One was haunting me. She came to the opera every night and I always knew when she entered, no matter where I was looking.

"In the end my resistance failed. Night after night I kept my eyes determinedly away from her box, while I felt all the while that she was trying to draw my glance. I did not know what she wanted, I did not know what I feared, but my dread was as black

as any nightmare, while as vague. It was like the dread of going to sleep that I used to feel when a little child — the sensation of yielding up my own conscious will.

"At last, one festival night, the crash came. My eyes turned, my will grew limp, my voice gave way. The curtain was rung down, people pitied or condemned and in either case demanded their money back.

"My impresario was indulgent as ever and coaxed me to take a rest and so repair my voice. But I had already been considering the renunciation of my art, and this determined me.

"I felt that evil was with me. I felt that I was being warned and I wanted to give up the world and give my life to religion. The thought had been growing day by day and I knew that I should ignore it no longer.

"So, in spite of the pleadings of my impresario and my friends, I entered a Spanish monastery."

The old priest sighed relief. This young brother, almost a son to him, had then made the sacrifice after all.

The younger had evidently told his story. "I cannot resist again," was all he said further, and with a gesture of despair he sank into a seat and the fog of thought once more settled over him.

It was nearly supper time, but he did not leave his seat in the inner corridor. Padre Juan went, and urged him to follow. He did not stir. He told someone who spoke to him that he did not care for food, and he sat on there until summoned to his few nightly duties. When they were finished he went back to the inner corridor and paced there slowly, watching the sky blacken and the stars come out above the sacred enclosed garden of the Mission where, by ancient rule, no woman is permitted to set foot.

For hours he walked there, measuring over and over the quadrangle of the garden. His beads moved swiftly.

Near a corner of the garden rises the belfry. Its entrance is from the outer corridor and one of its arched openings commands the whole inner quadrangle and the sacred garden. Padre Diego glanced up there once and noticed the beauty of the moon's lights and shadows playing through the belfry arches.

Then he bowed his head again and paced on. Beauty was for the world he had left. Devotion was for him.

"Save me for Thy works," he murmured.

It was long after midnight and the last laugh from the town had died and the crickets were growing quiet. The beads were on their fourteenth journey. The monastery slept.

Of a sudden the rosary fell and the priest's hands dropped, limp. Slowly his head turned and twice he resisted the impulse of his glance. Then, with a force that he could not stop, it shot up to the belfry arch.

She stood there, the Saint Woman. She was always white, and the moonlight made her whiter. She was as still as marble, and her gleaming, compelling eyes never swerved from his but held them prisoners.

When she moved at last it was to beckon him. "No," he thought he shouted, but in truth he only whispered. She leaned forward slightly so that her words might go down to him.

"You shall come," she said softly. "You shall come away with me. Don't go through the buildings — that might waken someone. See, I have a rope here. Come to me this way."

She let down the rope and he saw her fastening it to a beam.

"I will not come," he tried to shout, but only croaked faintly.

She went on tying it with hands that he noticed were as strong as they looked frail. When she had done, she said:

"If you do not come to me I shall go down there for you."

Into the sacred garden! Never to be profaned by woman's foot!

"You shall not!" he whispered. "I will come and end this."

He spoke defiantly, but he half expected to see her smile a challenge. She did not, however. She calmly waited, her eyes following him.

He sprang to the rope and grasped it. It had been prepared for the purpose and was knotted at intervals.

Up, up. He was within the belfry.

"We will go down together now — down and away." She said it quite simply as if it had been understood from the first. "I have waited a long time for you to come of yourself, but you would not."

His eyes and her opal ones were fast.

"I will end this," he said savagely.

"No," she answered gently, "you are mine now. How long I sought you in the Madrid opera. Night after night I went there

and made you notice me, and if you had stayed there I should have gained you in the end — I should have made my influence stronger until you would have left your art for me. But you escaped me then. You hid. I have followed and found you out at last, though, and you are mine."

Fiercely, madly, he struggled to struggle. That was all. In fact, he scarcely moved. He whispered, gasping:

"You are the Devil. It is godly to slay you. I will dash you down, down these stairs."

At the end his breath gave out and the words died away in the terrific fight he was making — the fight that strained muscle and nerve and showed him no more moving than a statue.

"Come down the stairs," she was saying.

When he reached them he tried to seize her and fling her down. But his hands were bound by something intangible.

All the time trying, vainly trying, he groped his way with her down the black, twirling flight. They passed from the glimmering moonlight that followed them and entered the darkness of the middle stairs that twisted themselves away from the light; the darkness swallowed them up for the distance of a few narrow winds, then out they came into the moonlight again. Her opal eyes once more met his and her cold hands touched him. He shivered away from her, but when she said in her purring voice, "This way," he followed.

On they ran, down the long road of white dust that leads to the sea. Her cold hand was always in his. At first he tried to drop it, but he could not, and at last he gave up and ceased to struggle, like a watcher overcome with sleep.

"Faster — we must hurry," she urged sweetly.

He obeyed tractably. They ran faster, faster.

A land wind bore a scent of petunias after them. He noticed it again and again, even as they reached the deck of the yacht, and felt the first flutter of its awakened sails. The scent of petunias was the last thing that meant the Mission to him.

It was the next day, when the yacht had disappeared and the talk had begun, that Dr. Poultney named her Saint Devil.

Miss Robin Hood.*

BY WILL B. WILDER.

"OW far is it to Colonel Hunter's?" asked Abbott, as the stableman brought his horse around to the front of the country tavern where he had stopped off for supper.

"You goin' there?"

"Yes. How far is it?"

"About three miles. Say, boys, he's goin' by the Upper Road."

Abbott had vaulted into his saddle, but something in the groom's voice, and in the answering murmur of interest from "the boys," made him pause and look at them all. There were half a dozen loungers on the porch and at the open door, and Abbott noted that they all turned and looked at him, half curiously, half in slow, countrified amusement.

"What's the joke?" he demanded cheerfully.

"Oh, nothing." Then, after a pause, some one drawled, "Hope you won't meet Miss Robin Hood, that's all."

"Who is Miss Robin Hood?"

"Well, if you get any information on that subject, the sheriff'll be mighty glad to have you give him a pointer."

"A highwayman — a highway*woman*, do you mean?"

"Looks that way. Three hold-ups on the Upper Road this summer — by a woman — masked. Smart as the devil. Gets away every time. Sheriff's nearly crazy."

Abbott gathered up the reins and laughed.

"Lively lot of farmers you must be up here, to let a woman walk around you like that," he said. "I hope Miss Robin Hood is attending to business to-night. I'd like nothing better than to meet her."

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He clattered away up the street, and the hotel loungers spat emphatically, and hoped, with varying degrees of profanity, that the coxcomb might have his wish.

Abbott rode on into the country, which lay beautifully mellow under the evening light. The road ran between prosperous-looking farms, turning, as country roads will, to skirt a pond or a hill, or to dip into a tree-grown hollow. It was a pleasant country this where Colonel Hunter had hired a house for the summer. Abbott was glad he had remembered the Colonel's invitation, given when they parted at Suez last spring, after a two months' intimacy on shipboard. Abbott had taken a fancy for the blustering, warm-hearted and warm-tempered Colonel. He remembered him very well, but for the life of him he could not remember what the Colonel had said about his family — except his daughter Kitty. There was no forgetting Kitty. Unconsciously Abbott slapped the reins on Beauty's neck. When a man is under thirty, and has been for four years on service as war correspondent in foreign lands, he has a right to feel his pulses jump at the thought of meeting one of his own fair countrywomen at home.

"Halt!"

The order rang so sharply across his thoughts that for a moment he was simply bewildered and did not obey. There was a flash, a report, and a pistol shot "across his bows" fanned the air against his cheek. He reined up abruptly, just as a dark pony and rider sprang from the bushes at his right and barred the road ahead of him.

"Hands up! Quick!"

He put up his hands without unnecessary delay. What he might have done if the order had come from a man doesn't matter. He could shoot from his hip if necessary, and there was a revolver in his pocket — but even a war correspondent is not inured to shooting slender, graceful women who ride like circus queens. Beyond a question, Miss Robin Hood had the advantage of him. So Abbott threw up his hands and wished nervously that she wouldn't fool with that pistol. It might go off!

"Keep your hands up and you won't get hurt," the highwaywoman said, in a slow, sweet voice. "I am going through your pockets — but you will be covered all the time."

"Really, I'm afraid there isn't enough in my pockets to make it worth your while, madam," said Abbott apologetically. "If I had known I was to have the pleasure of meeting you, I should have been better prepared."

"Just keep your hands up, that's enough," said Miss Robin Hood, bringing her pony beside Abbott's horse by a dexterous touch.

She proceeded to go through his pockets with one hand with a quickness and system that set Abbott to speculating whether she could possibly have a husband. He hadn't supposed that women knew so well where men's pockets were disposed!

His revolver she took possession of, and slipped it into her own pocket. As he had said, he carried no valuables in his pockets — and she went no deeper.

But Abbott had been watching his chance, and as she leaned toward him in the search he suddenly seized her pistol hand, pistol and all, and with a trick clasp he had learned in the East he opened her strong brown fingers and her pistol was in his hand.

"Drop it," she said quietly — and he dropped it, for she was holding his own revolver against his breast.

"You *are* quick," he said, with genuine admiration.

"I aim to please," she said sweetly. "That's all this time, I think. Pardon me if I carry off this handsome pistol as a souvenir — and to save you from any temptation to use it."

She slipped to the ground, picked up the pistol which he had dropped, and remounted — all as lightly as a circus queen, he thought again. As she sprang up, the gray veil which had masked her face fell to one side and for a fleeting instant he had a glimpse of a smooth cheek and a round chin melting upward into the curve of smiling lips. Then the pony sprang across the road into the dusky bushes, and nothing remained of his experience — *nothing save a ring which had slipped from her finger when he opened her hand with that Hindoo juggler's clasp.* He examined it as well as he could in the fading light — an emerald, set with small diamonds.

"I'll keep this as *my* souvenir," he laughed, as he slipped it into a secret inner pocket.

Then he started the puzzled Beauty on a sharp trot and covered the remaining distance to Colonel Hunter's house rapidly. Once

or twice he thought he heard a pony's feet beating the ground off to his left, and he wondered if by any possibility Miss Robin Hood could be trailing him — but he saw nothing.

Colonel Hunter welcomed him with enthusiasm.

"Well, well, well, my dear boy! You're as welcome as a newspaper to a man in the Arctic. Kitty and I have been boring each other to death in this dead and alive place — though Kitty gets what fun she can out of riding. She's out now, but she'll be back in time for dinner. Let me take you to your room. Jiminy, but I'm glad to have a *man* to talk to at last!"

As Abbott glanced from his window when his host had left him, a slim figure in a dark gray riding habit slipped past in the shadow of the lilac bushes and entered the house.

"Miss Kitty returned," he said to himself. Then he sat down on the edge of the bed and stared unseeingly at the sky for some minutes. The — the resemblance — was certainly — curious! But then — put half a dozen women into dark gray riding habits and set them against a background of dusk and low bushes, and probably they would all look more or less alike — probably they would all have that — that peculiar lissome grace of movement — though he'd be hanged if they would!

He hurried his dressing, but his hostess was already in the drawing-room when he came down,— a tall, graceful girl, with something in the outline of her figure strangely familiar.

"Papa has told me so much about you," she said in slow, sweet tones, holding out a firm brown hand frankly. "I hope you may not find it too dull here to make us a good long visit."

"I have struck nothing dull so far — quite the contrary," he answered cheerfully, watching where the round, saucy chin melted into the curve of her smiling lips. "You —" he paused an instant deliberately and repeated the pronoun — "you have already entertained me most delightfully."

"We aim to please," she said demurely, and dropped a teasing little courtesy.

Her voice, her words, her audacity in using them, made him stare. But she met his astonished look so simply and innocently that he fell back again with a gasp, and followed her into the dining-room in a dazed condition.

When Abbott went to his room that evening, he was the most puzzled man in the United States. His first flash of conviction had faded into irresolute doubt. There was a resemblance, certainly; but was it enough to argue identity? Her voice was *not* the same, though the slow, sweet manner of speech was similar. Had she disguised her voice in that first encounter? Or was he imagining the resemblance altogether? The line of cheek and chin seemed the same — but what did he know of girls, anyhow? Perhaps ten out of every hundred had that same round curve, if he should take note. Why should she do such a thing, anyhow? Could it be a bit of girlish mischief, inspired by the deadly dulness of life, and made possible because she knew how to ride and shoot? But he remembered the perfect breeding and dignity of the girl with whom he had dined, and then recalled the business-like manner in which Miss Robin Hood had gone through his pockets. That went beyond the bounds of innocent mischief. And had there not been other hold-ups? No, no, it was all impossible! He debated the question until he fell into a restless sleep in which he and the Colonel were exchanging shots on horseback, while Miss Kitty caught the bullets in mid-air on a conjuror's wand and turned them all into emerald rings.

But when he awoke and reviewed the situation, it was all too incredible, and he felt ashamed of himself for harboring his suspicions for a moment. He was still more ashamed half an hour later.

"Miss Robin Hood has been heard from again," Colonel Hunter said gleefully, as they came together before breakfast. "That woman is a caution, whoever she is."

"What has she done now?" Kitty asked in distressed tones, while Abbott turned and watched her face with anxious wonder.

"Held up old Farmer Gray last evening, just by that wooded bend in the road, shot his horse dead when he tried to get away, and robbed him of five hundred dollars he was going to pay off a mortgage with. Fairly ruined the poor old man."

"Oh, *poor* Mrs. Gray," cried Kitty. "She sells us our butter and eggs, and she is *so* nice." There were tears in her eyes as she raised them to Abbott — and he came to her side and bent to kiss her hand with old-fashioned formality.

"Bless you for your tender, womanly heart," he said, with such unexpected fervor that she colored beautifully and drew her hand away softly.

After that he let himself go. If there were still some curious facts which he could not understand, he simply put them out of his thoughts. His evidence might not have been enough for a court-room, but — was it to count for nothing that she had the most wonderful eyes and the most enchanting smile in the world? Then Nature's system of signalling was defective!

Colonel Hunter was an insistent host, and Abbott's visit lengthened into days and weeks. To preserve some appearance of independence, he had taken a room at the Hotel Grandon, but he used it less than the room which was now called his at Colonel Hunter's house. The truth of the matter was that his first doubt and wonder in regard to Kitty Hunter had given way to another — equally disquieting to him, but less unnatural — namely, to a wonder and doubt whether by any possibility she could be induced to care for him! In truth, he had fallen in love — fallen fast and far.

One day it occurred to him that he had never told his hosts of his own adventure with the mysterious highwaywoman, and as he dressed for dinner he slipped the emerald upon his finger to illustrate his story with it. But as it happened he didn't tell the story, for, before a chance came to bring it in, Colonel Hunter got started somehow on the subject of jewels, and interrupted an account of some odd things he had found in the Orient to say to his daughter:

"By the way, Kitty, why don't you wear that emerald I gave you any more?"

Kitty did not lift her eyes from her plate as she answered — after a pause that sent all the blood in Abbott's body to his heart —

"I haven't it with me up here."

"Haven't? Where in the world did you leave it?"

Again Kitty paused before she answered, with a poor attempt at lightness:

"Oh, it is in safe hands, you may be sure!"

Her father looked at her sharply, and resumed his soup and his

conversation. But several times he broke off what he was saying to glance at her with that same look of doubt and suspicion. At last his face cleared and he exclaimed heartily:

"Say, Kitty, you're mistaken about not having that emerald with you. I distinctly remember that you were wearing it that day when Dr. Barclay came up from town, because he examined it. That was only a day or two before Abbott came."

Kitty had turned singularly pale. "Yes, I remember now," she said slowly. "You are right about that."

"You have mislaid it, careless child, and never missed it," cried her father with a loud laugh. "Wait till I give you another ring, my girl!"

Kitty laughed nervously and lifted her eyes to Abbott, who was regarding her steadily and sadly. Her eyes wavered under his look and fell to where his hand rested on the edge of the table, with the forgotten emerald flashing on his finger. She gave a little cry that made Abbott's heart ache, and glanced with swift fear at her father and back imploringly to Abbott. He instantly dropped his hand.

"What *is* the matter, Kitty?" demanded Colonel Hunter impatiently. "You act like a hysterical schoolgirl."

She did, indeed, for the next moment she was sobbing so uncontrollably that there was nothing for it but to leave the room.

"What the mischief is the matter with the girl? I never knew her to act like this in all her life," protested the bewildered Colonel. "She must be tired out. I don't believe these long rides she is so fond of taking are good for her."

Abbott swallowed his coffee at a gulp.

"I don't believe they are," he agreed earnestly. "Can't you prevent them? Send her pony away, and put — put temptation out of reach!"

"I believe I will. Come, she has spoiled one dinner for both of us; shall we have a game of cards?"

"No, thank you," said Abbott, rising with nervous relief. "I must go back to the village at once. Will you present my excuses to Miss Hunter?"

He got out of the house with unceremonious haste. To have a chance to think was the one thing he wanted. As he wheeled

into the main road, his horse turned his head and neighed, and Abbott pulled up sharply at an answering tramp among the bushes. A riderless pony was standing tied just off the road. Abbott turned in his saddle, and looked back at the house. Kitty's balcony window faced toward him, and, though the dusk had fallen, what he did see was significant enough. A slender figure in a riding habit of dark gray stood outlined for an instant on the balcony, and then slid down to the ground by means of a trellis which he knew leaned against the house.

Abbott pulled his hat down over his eyes and rode slowly on, letting the horse take his own path and pace. Was Kitty Hunter *insane?* There are some things which it is impossible for a man to believe of the woman he loves. Better, infinitely better, that she be found insane — or dead.

The sound of a pony's feet behind cut across his thoughts and made him sit up. Could it be that in this way she was seeking an interview with him? He rode on slowly until he reached a shadowy clump of wayside trees, and then he deliberately halted. The pony came up at a gallop — even at that moment he could not help admiring the swinging grace with which she rode — and the next instant a scarf or shawl was thrown over his head, completely blinding him, and then he felt a noose tighten about his arms, binding them to his body. In the first surprise he instinctively struggled a moment; then he dropped his hands and waited quietly. He knew at once what she wanted. He sat motionless and silent while she examined first one of his hands and then the other, and then went through his pockets. He knew when she found the ring, and he knew she had taken nothing else from his purse. Then he heard the pony clatter off. He freed his arms with little difficulty and lifted the cloth from his head. It was a small embroidered shawl of Japanese silk which Kitty had often worn of an evening.

For three days he staid at the Grandon, unable to tear himself away from the neighborhood, unable to return to Colonel Hunter's house, waiting vaguely for something to happen. Something did. On the third day, as evening fell, Colonel Hunter was brought into the village by some farmers who had found him lying on the road, sorely wounded.

"It was Miss Robin Hood. I was fool enough to think she wouldn't actually shoot," he said, before he fainted from loss of blood.

"He hasn't a shadow of a chance," the doctor said, after a hasty examination of the wound.

"I'll carry word to his daughter," said Abbott; and the people, who knew his intimacy at the house, left him to bear the message, while they set about organizing a sheriff's posse to scour the country for the highwaywoman.

Abbot rode as he would not have ridden for his life. Did she know that it was her own father that she had shot? Mad or not, wicked or not, he must see her, — must see her at once.

He left his steaming horse at the gate and entered by a side-door without seeing a servant. He hurried through to the library, where, to his surprise, he heard voices and gay laughter. Unceremoniously he opened the door, and faced Kitty and a young man — a young man who had Kitty's eyes and Kitty's laugh and Kitty's slender figure and slim brown hands. The three stared at each other in silent astonishment for a moment, and then Kitty sprang forward.

"Oh, Mr. Abbott, please don't tell. This is my brother Dick, — my darling twin brother — and papa — papa has forbidden me to see him — and I *had* to see him. Papa is angry just now because Dick won't be a soldier, but — but — oh, he will forgive him in time, and dear Dick can come back to us. But *please* don't tell him that I have seen Dick while he was away. Why, Dick is so afraid of being seen that he wears an old habit of mine when he comes out here, so that if any one *should* see him, they would think it was I."

Abbott's heart had leaped into his throat at her first word and he put out his hand to steady himself. The revulsion of feeling nearly swept him from his feet. She was innocent! She did not even know her brother's guilt. If possible he would save her from ever knowing.

"Your father has met with an accident," he said, after that moment's rapid thinking. "That is what I came out to tell you. Now I will ask your brother to come back with me at once, and — I will explain to him on the way."

"Oh, can't I come, too? How did it happen? Is it serious? Oh, I must go to him!"

"Not to-night. Promise me you will stay here to-night. To-morrow I will come back, and then you shall do as you wish."

She looked at him with earnest inquiry, and then yielded with a sweetness that made it hard for him not to take her in his arms.

"If you think best —" she said.

"I say, is the governor badly hurt?" asked Dick, with unmistakable anxiety.

Abbott did not answer till he got him outside of the house. Then he let him have it.

"Yes, I'm afraid it is pretty bad. But now — where's your pony? Tied in the brush?"

The boy grinned. "You seem to have caught on."

"I've had reason to. The thing for you to do now is to get on that pony of yours and ride as you never rode before. The sheriff has a posse out after you, and there is no time to lose."

The boy whistled. "Whew! That looks serious. I say, did you give me away?"

Abbott stared in astonishment at his effrontery. "I'm afraid you did that yourself," he said drily. "There, don't stop to talk. If you can reach the railroad at some way station, you may get off. I think that's enough said. Good-bye."

"You're nervous," laughed the boy. But he stepped aside into the bushes, and in a minute Abbott heard the quick clatter of his pony's feet scampering off. He drew a deep breath of relief when the sound died out, and then galloped back to town, in hope of being able to delay the posse by some ruse. But for that he was too late. The sheriff and his mounted men had already scattered to patrol the country roads in all directions. A system of signals had been arranged, he learned — a gun was to be fired if Miss Robin Hood were captured — one gun if captured alive and unharmed, two if wounded, three if dead. He listened silently to the excited talk of the people, while he was calculating how long it would take for Dick Hunter to reach a way station beyond the line of search. Well, at any rate, nothing more could be done now.

Abbott spent the night watching, with a young doctor of the town, over Colonel Hunter, whose consciousness had not returned,

and who sank steadily through the long hours of darkness. The little village settled down into its peaceful sleep, but for Abbott the night was a long, anxious vigil, filled with tumultuous doubts and fears. If only Kitty might be spared from knowing! At last the day broke and the village awoke, and Abbott looked at his watch with a sigh of relief. Surely by this time the boy must have got away beyond reach of pursuit.

There came a clatter of hoofs down the street — one of the posse returning. Abbott sprang to the window as the man reined up at the little public square, and raised his rifle. The signal! A shot startled the quiet town — another — a third — and the man lowered his rifle, while the people who had appeared mysteriously on the street crowded about him. Three shots — dead!

Abbott stood still for a moment, paralyzed by this new complication. It would be impossible now to keep the truth from the boy's sister — yet how tell her that her father had been shot by her brother's hand, that brother an outlaw, shot in turn by the officers of the law? He was turning the thought in desperation, when a voice in the hall below broke in upon him — *her* voice!

"But I must and will see my father," she was protesting. "It is my right."

Abbott exchanged glances with the young doctor, who had joined him, and went down the stairs two steps at a time.

"Miss Kitty, come in here one moment first," he said, leading her into the dingy little hotel parlor. He closed the door and took her hands in both his own.

"My darling, before you hear what has happened — before you go upstairs — I want to tell you that I love you. That means that I am here by your side to help you if you need me, to stand between you and any sorrow that I can keep from you, to do whatever you may want me to do. I tell you this now, not because I want an answer — I am not making love to you — but because if you feel that you need me, you must know that I am here."

She caught her breath with a sob, and her hands fluttered in his. "Oh, *what* has happened? Poor papa — ?"

"Your father was shot by — by your brother. Don't look so! He didn't know what he was doing — I feel sure of that. And now — I would save you from knowing if I could, Kitty — your

unhappy brother has met the fate he dealt to his father. He was killed last night by the sheriff's men."

Kitty Hunter had borne up under a good deal of stress, but this was too much for her overtaxed nerves. She sighed like a tired child, and slipped forward without a word, in a dead faint.

"My poor child," breathed Abbott, thinking compassionately of her awaking, while he gently chafed her pulseless hands.

"In here? Now? I must see her," cried an impatient voice outside, and Abbott sprang to his feet as the door was flung open with a bang. Dick Hunter stood there, defiant, dust-stained and haggard — but Dick, and alive.

"Is my sister here? What have you been saying to her?" he demanded angrily, coming quickly inside.

"For heaven's sake, what are you doing here? Reckless boy, why have you come back?" cried Abbott. He sprang to the window and looked out. The sheriff and two of his men, all mounted, were stationed outside. Doubtless the house was guarded all about. He put his hand heavily on the shoulder of the boy, who had knelt beside his sister.

"Do they know you are here? If you hope to escape, we must lose no time. Come — come before she recovers and sees you."

Dick shook his hand off impatiently, and made no other answer.

"Kitty," he called softly — and Kitty opened her eyes, looked at him, and began to sob.

There was a sound of hurrying feet in the hall. Abbott sprang to the door, but he was too late. The sheriff entered hastily, and with him the young doctor.

"Here he is!" cried the doctor. "Mr. Abbott, the Colonel has recovered consciousness, and wants to see you. He's going to pull through all right after all, thank heaven!"

"Then you can come over at once and give your certificate on Miss Robin Hood," said the sheriff to the doctor. "The body is at the jail. I'm glad I don't have this sort of a job on my hands every night of the year," he added grimly.

"Body at the jail? *Whose* body?" gasped Abbott.

"Miss Robin Hood's, as they call her. We surrounded her, and she opened fire — and some fool fired back. I would have given my right hand to prevent it."

"Then — then — who *was* she?" Abbott managed to stammer.

"Moll Deemer, her real name is. We were practically sure of it before, but her confession, after she was shot, gives all the story. Well, we are all sinners. Come, Doctor."

They left the room, and Abbott walked back to Dick, who had been talking earnestly with his sister.

"Well, young man?" said Abbott sternly.

Dick tried to scowl, but it ended in a laugh.

"Well, if I scared you, I guess you've got even with me, by what Kitty tells me you've been saying about me. I've a mind to have you arrested for defamation of character."

"How far did your pranks go? This is serious."

"Honestly, I never held any one up but yourself. The first time was just for fun — just to see if you'd squeal, you know. I was at the hotel that evening, and heard you wish that you might meet her, and I thought it would be a shame not to trot out all the sights for my father's guest. Then — I had to get back that ring, you know, because it was Kitty's, and she was worried about it. I was at the house that evening. But I suppose I was a fool to do it."

"Yes, you were," Abbott agreed heartily. "Now just go off and reflect on that." He put him firmly outside of the door, and came back to Kitty.

"Do you remember what I was saying before you fainted?"

"Why — not very distinctly."

"Then I shall have to say it all over again. I love you — I love you — love you — "

"Oh, but when you said that you thought Dick was a highwayman, and — and you were sorry for me. Now that you know he isn't, you needn't feel bound by what you said under that misapprehension."

But Abbott's answer has nothing to do with this story, which ends with Miss Robin Hood.

The Lynching at Crutcher's.*

BY DAVID LOWRY.

RUTCHER pushed the door open and walked in silently. His wife was frying bacon and eggs. She heard the sound of Dan's hoofs just as the sun's slanting rays shifted from the notch on the support of the porch she stood on waiting for her husband, turned mechanically and placed the frying pan on the fire. Crutcher would be famished — without dinner. It was a tiresome ride to Riggstown, and mostly up hill home. She was inclined to be hysterical — she had cried hysterically the moment she was left alone that day. The strange warning that Crutcher had received the day before disturbed both as they had not been moved since Bill left home. It was so vague, yet it came from a friend.

"Why can't folks speak out?" Mrs. Crutcher said to herself for the fiftieth time that day as she turned the even slices of bacon and wiped her eyes furtively the last time — she wouldn't let Jim see she had been crying. But when Jim strode in and hung his hat on the peg without speaking it required an extraordinary effort to restrain the tears. He walked out of the back door, lifted the gourd and drank heartily. Then he walked in and sat down.

"Bill's dead."

Something clutched his wife's throat. If her salvation depended on it she could not utter a word. She put her hand to her throat.

"I mean he's the same as dead to us."

Then the mother asserted herself. The frying pan was forgotten as she faced him sternly.

"Jim Crutcher!"

"Needn't talk any. No use." Crutcher's boot — the boot

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crossing his left leg — was swinging now. "He's as good as dead — to us."

"You seen Graham? What did he say? Why didn't he come out and tell us? It is the littlest he could do, seeing what we did for them."

"Well, now, if I'd anything to tell that was incouragin'. But Graham don't know. He heard a man like Bill was yanked up near Treemont. From all accounts it may be Bill."

"What did — the man do?"

"Stole the sheriff's hoss — and plugged the sheriff."

"Is the sheriff dead?"

"Laid out in Hopper's saloon."

"*Oh, Jim!*" The bacon sizzled — an odor filled the cabin. At any other time its mistress would have exclaimed. Now she put a hand over her eyes and sat down beside her husband.

"It can't be helped." The contortion Jim's features presented at that moment showed what it cost him. But now the wheels of a wagon crunched the rocky road below them. When the Barkers passed in a creaking wagon five minutes later Crutcher was playing his fiddle and Mrs. Crutcher was looking out of the door. She nodded to the three Barkers in the wagon.

When Crutcher tried to eat, a few minutes later, he could not swallow the meat he liked so much. He got up from the table and lit his pipe.

That was the way misery came to Crutcher's. Their only son had left his home in a "tiff" six months before his last unaccountable leavetaking. When he returned he was welcomed as though he had brought back great riches instead of ragged clothes. By the time he was "rigged out to kill," to borrow the words of his associates on Dowell's Flat, he disappeared again mysteriously between two days. No one had ever seen him or heard of him since. That was four years ago.

"I'm dead tired." Jim Crutcher laid his pipe down as he spoke. Silence brooded over the valley again. The victuals were untouched. "Guess I'll turn in."

Mrs. Crutcher sat motionless looking out of the window long after her husband went to bed. The mysterious afterglow in the sky, the motionless pines on the hills opposite, the clouds hanging

motionless above the little valley, the sheep grazing far below her on the toothsome grass — all were unnoticed. Not a leaf stirred — the world seemed to be fresh from the Maker's hand. There was no human being to help her — to comfort her. The blow had paralyzed Jim Crutcher — it was the first time the man had been crushed, but he made no pretence of holding up his head — he walked to his bed like a man in a waking dream. Mrs. Crutcher sat far into the night. She scarcely knew whether she were awake or dreaming the greater portion of the time. She was young again; Jim Crutcher was the best dancer in the country-side; a master hand with the fiddle. When he married her and took her to his new house on the county road everybody predicted they would make their way in the world. Then Will was born — "Bill" later on he was called. Before he was able to walk they came out West. And then she thanked God she had a man child. Bill thrived. He was the wonder of the neighborhood. What couldn't Bill do when he was ten? And what a time they had only the last turkey shoot over Bill's fancy shooting, when he vanquished the crack shots from Warm Springs. And now —

"Hain't you been to bed?"

Then she realized, as she stared up in a dazed way at her husband, that she was half waking, half dreaming. Jim Crutcher said no more. He was always considerate; now he was wise.

It rained that day as it had never rained within the memory of the oldest resident on Dowell's Flat. It kept up the following night. The rain did not cease the next day. Nobody worked. For the simple reason, as the biggest loafer on Dowell's Flat — Ham Carter — alleged, that there was no use wasting time doing anything until they knew whether the Flat was going to be there or not.

The waters were creeping up to a height unknown. Some of the frame houses were floating out into the current. At noon a passing kiss of the waters wrenched the new school house from its base. Long before one it had passed out of the sight of teacher and pupils. When cords and lines, such as Driggs, the hardware man, relied on, were unable to bear the strain imposed upon them, and the hardware store swept against the post office, a brief diversion was provided the onlookers who saw Sam Moore —

whose law office was over the post office — staggering down the steps with his arms full of books and papers. He called for assistance. Only Billy Coombs paid any attention to him. Billy was half witted. Moore swore roundly — jeers and laughter was his only answer. He barely escaped sinking to his waist in the roily water. As he waded ashore, holding his books and papers high above his head, the guffaw that met him silenced him for the time.

Needless to add that by this time the male portion of the population, like a shipwrecked crew, resorted to whiskey. With the exception of the preacher, every man on Dowell's Flat was "roaring drunk" — to employ Hart Caughey's vivid language — or in a fair way to illustrate that condition. Half the men were crowded into Hart's saloon, where the water was swirling in eddies under the floor. The other half of the population was crowded into Jim Crutcher's cabin up the cove.

Jim Crutcher was the most eccentric member of a community composed of Swedes, Norwegians, Yankees, Western men and men who drawled their vowels — Southerners. All hard workers when there was work to be done, but swart, horny handed with toil. The material for a forlorn hope, if properly directed, just as certainly as men's passions and moods could be swayed to mock heaven.

The women and children were housed in Hatcher's big barn. The women accepted their misfortune without murmuring, the children regarded the experience in the light of a frolic.

It was about two o'clock, judging from after comparisons, when a stranger elbowed his way into Hart Caughey's saloon. Where he came from nobody knew. How he came was a puzzle. He never came down the river, the experienced said. No man could make his way across Dowell's Flat without a boat, dry-legged, as the stranger stood before Caughey's bar. And the rains had made the road passing Hank's Point soggy, boggy — he couldn't ride over without getting himself covered with yellow mud!

"Just shove that jug this way, landlord."

The crowd in Caughey's saw the stranger reach a hand — his left — for the jug Caughey pushed towards him. The stranger pushed a gold piece toward Caughey, poured out two-thirds of a tumbler, swallowed it at a gulp. Then, resting an elbow on the counter, he said as he glanced about him:

"Any old-timers here?"

"Don't know what *you* call old timers." Caughey rubbed his chin contemplatively. "I've been here since sixty-seven." Caughey's claim to be the oldest settler on Dowell's Flat had never been disputed.

A loud splashing at that moment arrested the attention of the crowd in the saloon. The door was burst rather than pushed open and the flushed face of Lige Hitchcock was framed in the doorway. His hair was dishevelled, his vest unbuttoned, his collar wide open. Perspiration rolled from his forehead and cheeks.

A dozen voices filled the saloon at once:

"What's up?"

Lige turned from one to another. "Murder's up!" He swept the crowd with a glance. "Somebody's killed Ben Mason — cut his throat from ear to ear."

In less than a minute the saloon was emptied, its only remaining occupants being the stranger and Hart Caughey.

Mason had lived alone. He had means, but he was morose and snappy-tongued, and found fault with everything under the sun. But now that he was dead — *murdered* — his ungovernable temper and prejudices were forgotten. The crowd that looked at the dead blacksmith beheld, if possible, an expression more ferocious in death than Mason's was in life. The awful repose and inscrutable expression that frequently softens the features of the dead were absent. The man had been cut down when animal passions were aflame.

One or two coins lay on the floor; a chair was overturned; near the smith's right hand was the helve of an axe. A brief search satisfied the crowd that robbery had been the motive — thorough search that the smith's money was stolen. The crowd left the smith's cabin as quickly as they had entered it. Blind impulse ruled. Reason, charity, common sense had no place there. Inflamed with drink, resolved to lose no time in punishing the murderer if he could be found, the crowd floundered through the mud back to Caughey's saloon.

The stranger was talking to Caughey when the crowd entered. The foremost man grasped him.

"We want you," he said huskily.

The devil shone in the eyes that surrounded the stranger. Wasn't it plain to everybody? The stranger had come over the hills. He had stopped overnight with Mason, doubtless. How else could he reach the Flat without splashing mud all over himself? His boots were clean. Mason had "put up a good fight" — the cabin showed that much — but doubtless the murderer took unfair advantage of him. It was bad enough to rob him — it was worse to cut his throat!

The stranger at first endeavored to reason with the crowd — until he realized that every word he uttered was twisted against him. Then a strange calm grew on him. He seemed to realize that his last hour had come. He contemplated his captors, at first contemptuously, then pityingly.

Where would they hang him?

The saloon was tottering on its pegs. Hart Caughey paused in the work of carrying his precious stores out of the saloon long enough to warn the crowd. Then somebody shouted, "Let's take him to Crutcher's."

The crowd echoed hoarsely "To Crutcher's!"

Crutcher was playing his fiddle when his door was opened without preliminary knock. Several men entered. Crutcher listened with bated breath to the story. Certainly the man who had killed Mason ought to be hanged! Crutcher was ready to help hang him!

On the slope near Crutcher's house a large walnut tree spread its limbs. Under this tree an excited crowd gathered around the prisoner, who again essayed in vain to obtain a hearing. He tried to tell them that he had been absent from the country four years — that he had only returned the day before — to all of which the crowd returned mocking answers. They were still under the sway of King Alcohol.

"For God's sake," the preacher implored with streaming eyes, "give him time to pray."

The prisoner smiled scornfully.

"I never believed in death-bed prayers."

"Well," persisted the preacher, "let him give us his name. It may be a kindness to his relatives to learn — "

A laugh interrupted the preacher. The majority there were of

the opinion that the relatives of a man hanged for robbery and murder would not thank anybody for the information.

Jim Crutcher was making his way to the centre of the group about the prisoner. His manner now was strangely irresolute. Those near him remarked his pallor. He was not thinking of the dead man. A living man — his own son, a prisoner charged with murder — was in his mind. Strange that he had even for a moment failed to realize the position he voluntarily placed himself in.

Crutcher was pressing through the crowd when his wife, who could no longer resist the overmastering desire to look on the prisoner, advanced to the window quickly and glanced out.

It was a bold face — a face easily read — that was turned to her as the stranger stood calmly, fearlessly facing Crutcher, who at that moment pushed his way through the crowd. The prisoner started, his lips parted, but before he could speak a woman's shriek filled the air. The crowd parted right and left as Mrs. Crutcher flung herself upon the stranger, exclaiming:

"Don't you see, Jim! *It's our Bill!*"

Years afterward they related how Crutcher had volunteered to help hang his own son, whose innocence was established the next day. And his four years' record proved as "straight as a bee line."

The Door Without a Keyhole.*

BY J. L. DAVIES.

IT certainly was puzzling. We had watched him go in any number of times. I had, in a cautious way, examined the door, after I had seen him leave the house, and knew the door was locked, having tried the knob. Together we had watched him from behind closely curtained windows, pull out a bunch of keys, and, after carefully selecting one, open the door and disappear inside. But where was the keyhole? We could not discover any signs of one. It began to prey on our minds. I lost all interest in everything else, and spent most of my time in watching that door. The house was directly across the street, and I had an unobstructed view of the doorknob. Every time I saw him coming I would rush to the window and strain my eyes to discover the method he employed in entering.

In my well-regulated life I had never yet allowed anything to so completely control my every action, but when one sees with his own eyes the entrance of a man into a house, with a key in his hand, and no keyhole in the door, I do not think one is to be blamed for yielding to a natural curiosity.

It was in a very uneasy and nervous state of mind that I decided to call upon my old friend, Michael O'Hara, chief of police. He laughed heartily at my story, but noting my extreme nervousness, suddenly became serious, and asked in what way he could serve me. Did I want the man arrested? Should he send an officer to watch the house? Anything he could do would be done.

I could think of no better plan than to have a man put on watch, and I suggested that to operate safely and attract little attention, he had best come to my house and begin his vigil there.

With the chief's promise of the detective that afternoon, I took my leave, determined to have a closer look at the mysterious

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premises on my way home. As I approached the house and obtained a near view of the haunting—I might almost say accursed —doorknob, of which I had thought so much, even in my dreams, I started with something like terror, fearing I must still be dreaming, for now there was no knob at all, though I most distinctly saw a keyhole. I stared like one bereft, and then ran across the street and into my own house. My wife met me in the hall, but I rushed by her and into my room, and flung myself upon a couch, burying my head in my hands. My wife followed me, trying to calm my excitement, and discover what had occurred.

"The keyhole is gone! No; the doorknob is gone! Oh! No! I don't know which is gone," I gasped.

"Oh! Is it the door opposite that has caused you to lose control of yourself?" exclaimed my wife. "What is the matter now?"

"There is no doorknob, but there is a keyhole," I answered.

"That is very strange," said my wife. "Are you sure?"

She walked to the window, and I followed, in a dazed condition. We looked out together, and there, where I could have sworn I had a few minutes before seen a keyhole, there was nothing but a knob! My wife looked at me curiously, to see if I was demented. As we stood looking across at the house, the occupant came out and, closing the door, walked rapidly away.

That afternoon the detective called, and I showed him to the front room, gave him a comfortable seat in a commanding position, and pointed out the house, across the way. He asked me a number of questions, to which I gave slight heed, for I was revolving a plan that would carry me into the enemy's country—for by this time I considered the man across the way my enemy. It was nothing more nor less than to beard the lion in his den. I would call on him that very day, as soon as he returned. I felt that I could not get a night's sleep after what I had seen that day.

I explained the sudden disappearance of the knob, followed by the disappearance of the keyhole, and asked the officer if he would accompany me on my projected visit, and he readily agreed.

We sat smoking and talking for nearly two hours, and I had regained something of my customary composure, when the watchful detective suddenly pressed my arm. Following his glance, I saw the occupant of the opposite house ascending the steps.